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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: ZIMBABWEAN CLERGY MORE OUTSPOKEN AGAINST POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Summary:

[11.](#) (SBU) The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo recently lambasted the Mugabe regime, even calling it fascist, and the Methodist Bishop of Harare recently urged the High Court to be courageous and resist corruption. Precious few church leaders have been as outspoken, and clergy and commentators have only recently tapped into the socially perceived need for leadership and criticized church higher-ups for their silence. A local USAID-supported NGO sponsored a recent conference of church and civic leaders to inspire church leaders to take a stand. Growing calls from ordinary clergy and parishioners for an end to political violence are a welcome development and likely will pressure church leaders to play a more active role in the search for a resolution of Zimbabwe's political crisis. End Summary.

Growing Pressure from Clergy

[12.](#) (U) The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube, has long been an outspoken critic on the GOZ's use of violence and human rights abuses. In the opening remarks of his November 6 address to church leaders in Durban, Archbishop Ncube, accused the GOZ of being fascist. He went on to detail a litany of violence and injustice perpetrated on the people of Zimbabwe by the Mugabe regime in the past 3 years. By his own count, 160 people had already died of starvation in Matabeleland. He appealed to the audience to lobby, wherever possible, the Mugabe regime to change.

[13.](#) (U) In November 2002, clergy from the Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Church of Christ in Matabeleland issued a statement in full support of Archbishop Ncube in which they "condemn(ed) in the strongest terms the actions of Mugabe and his government in hijacking food supplies and distributing them in a partisan way" and said they "hear(d) the cries of suffering, the harassed and starving people of our country for help".

[14.](#) (U) In December 2002 churches in Manicaland issued a statement in support of Archbishop Ncube and the Matabeleland clergy, complaining of an "ongoing government-controlled campaign of intimidation, fear and violence". Further criticizing the GOZ they said, "the situation we now face is extremely serious as famine stalks our land... the President and government are responsible for this situation... In the face of evil, the rhetoric of self-justification continues to resound from the corridors of power." The clergy accused the GOZ of denying reality and resorting to lies.

[15.](#) (U) On January 13 at the opening of the High Court in Harare Bishop Cephass Mukandi, the head of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe implored High Court judges to shun selective justice and resist being corrupted--both of which erode confidence in the judicial system. He went on to say that cowards could not rebuild Zimbabwe; the task requires persons of courage with a genuine love and concern for the welfare of others. He said administrators of justice should let their service to Zimbabweans be based on the knowledge that everyone is created in the image of God and should be treated fairly--implying that some defendants had not been.

GOZ Denounces Ncube

[16.](#) (SBU) The GOZ has repeatedly urged churches to keep out of politics, unless it was supportive of the GOZ. Information Minister Jonathan Moyo denounced Ncube as a "mad bishop", and called for his resignation. According to the former Director of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) in Zimbabwe, Michael Auret, the GOZ approached the Vatican to request Ncube's retirement, and Ncube himself reported to the Ambassador he had received death threats. But according to University of Zimbabwe political scientist John Makumbe, Ncube represents an invincible constituency, the church, and the Vatican has backed Ncube.

GOZ Apologists at the Pulpit

17. (SBU) Precious few church leaders have taken a stand, and at least one is an outspoken GOZ apologist. The Anglican Bishop of Harare, Nolbert Kunonga, commented in January 2002 that President Mugabe was more Christian than himself. In October 2002 Kunonga was denied a court order to ban 19 of his own church wardens from the Anglican cathedral in downtown Harare for disrupting his pro-government sermons with impromptu hymn-singing. Kunonga was elected bishop in 2001 after allegedly using ruling party influence to secure his nomination; he was subsequently accused of firing priests who opposed his nomination. The Catholic Archbishop of Harare, Patrick Chakaipa, a long-time friend of Mugabe, tried unsuccessfully in 1997 to suppress a CCJP report on atrocities committed by the GOZ in Matabeleland in the 1980s. The Catholic Bishop of Mutare, Alexio Muchabaiwa, refused to denounce the expulsion by war veterans and the CIO last year of a Catholic Priest from his diocese, Father Patrick Kelly. Johane Masowe, who leads his own apostolic sect, has stated publicly his support for the ruling party. Several other apostolic church leaders have taken pro-GOZ positions and received GOZ favors in turn.

18. (U) In a December 2002 statement entitled "That There May be Peace and Prosperity," the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the umbrella organization of mainline Protestant churches, called upon newly-resettled farmers to "make the best possible use of the land entrusted to them". Clergy and commentators subsequently blasted the statement in the independent press for appeasing the GOZ and sanctioning the land invasions which have left hundreds of thousands of farm workers destitute. Rev. Graham Shaw of Bulawayo said the statement was carefully crafted, and politically correct, but betrayed Zimbabwean victims of oppression, and ignored monstrous injustices and the desperate urgency of half the population facing starvation.

Consensus for Peace and Action

19. (SBU) On December 13 - 14 the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, a USAID grantee, sponsored a Peace Conference in Bulawayo to develop a unified action plan for political change in Zimbabwe for churches and civil society groups. Four hundred seventeen people attended the conference including eight bishops from the Catholic, Anglican, Brethren in Christ and Evangelical churches, 70 pastors, and 50 civil society organization delegates.

110. (U) According to Brian Kagoro, Crisis in Zimbabwe coordinator, the major successes of the conference were bringing together all of the major churches in the country with civil society groups, developing a common position on governance and rule of law, and agreeing to advocate publicly for an immediate cessation of violence and intolerance in Zimbabwe.

111. (SBU) Kagoro said discussions focused on the modalities of changing government in Zimbabwe, and on national healing in the wake of state-sponsored violence and impunity. While there was agreement that change was necessary, the participants disagreed on whether to forgive perpetrators of official violence, and in the context of the HIV pandemic whether to approve of abstinence. Kagoro admitted the conference was too short to address the 5 broad areas covered: 1. governance and human rights, 2. regional advocacy, 3. agrarian reform and food security, 4. truth, justice and reconciliation, and 5. the HIV pandemic.

112. (U) The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition circulated a draft National Peace Accord to be signed by participating church and civic groups in the coming days setting out a code of conduct for government, and a process to mitigate violence.

Repeated Calls for Leadership

113. (U) Commentators in the independent media have lamented the relative silence of most church higher-ups against the brutality of the Mugabe regime. Noting the example set by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa, on January 15 Daily News Columnist Tanonoka Whande wrote, "the silence of our churches is as painful and intolerable as it is baffling... Some of us are hurting. We are hurting for a few words of spiritual encouragement... Church leaders, please stand up. Your flock is scattering. You are not only deacons, but beacons." On January 16, in the same paper Saul Gwakuba applauded Archbishop Pius Ncube and Bishop Cephass Mukandi, but he complained that other church leaders have been notably silent. Recalling that biblical prophets stood for what was right, rather than what was convenient, he implored Zimbabwean church leaders to choose between justice and tyranny, evil and righteousness.

Comment:

114. (SBU) The GOZ has managed to silence most churches by securing support of at least some, usually Harare-based

bishops in most churches, thereby inhibiting any united critical church position. Nor has the GOZ and Mugabe personally hesitated to blast away at any church critics who stuck their heads up. The recent outspoken statements by Ncube and Mukandi in particular are a departure from the silence of church leaders during the crisis in Zimbabwe over the past year. Noting peoples' need for leadership against violence and injustice, and increasing frustration and confusion about apathy in their church hierarchies, clergy and commentators have recently called on their church leaders to take a stand. The USAID-supported Peace Conference of church and civic leaders in Bulawayo aimed at opening a frank dialogue between community and church leaders in hopes that the latter would take a stronger role in advocating for change. The resolution to become more outspoken in the pulpit, coupled with the outspokenness of Ncube and Mukandi are important indications of church leadership for change in its infancy. Sparks of activism within what some have described as an invincible constituency are encouraging, and growing pressure from clergy around the country could prompt senior church leaders to work more actively for an end to political violence. End Comment.

SULLIVAN